

# ANAMAKEE



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*“I think I’m through with the fighting  
Chopped off my heavy, heavy hands  
I see the blue spot fading  
Keep it down, Keep it down  
I think I’m through with the fighting  
Two turns away from turning blue  
You can watch if you want to.”—Mason Proper*



# 1

Floyd's face and neck were wet when he awakened.

He sat up in his recliner and rubbed his face.

Nausea washed over him.

Dad's jacked up the heat again, he thought.

Cowboy Bebop was on Adult Swim.

He looked at the clock, and saw that it was after one.

He heard the entrance near the kitchen open.

Floyd heard Henry semi-yell "Where the fuck have you been?"

He closed his eyes and slammed his head against the cushion, muttering "Fuck" repeatedly.

He couldn't make out his brother's response, but he could make out what sounded like "Lois", his girlfriend's name.

"Why didn't you answer your phone?" Henry asked.

Will gave another answer Floyd could barely hear.

"HOW FAR ARE YOU GOING TO FUCKING PUSH ME?!" Henry yelled, stomping the floor.

Floyd heard Will's answer this time.

He claimed that Lois wanted to stay out later.

"YOU FUCKING COCKSUCKER!" Henry yelled.  
"GET THE FUCK OUT OF MY SIGHT!"

Floyd heard Will walk down the hall, enter his

room, and shut the door.

He heard Henry shut off the television, stomp down the hall, and slam his bedroom door.

Floyd got up, turned his television towards his bed, and slid under the covers.

He adjusted his pillows, and continued watching Adult Swim until he fell asleep.

## 2

Floyd brought the bags filled with gloves, aprons, and meat coats to the Soil area.

The three bags he left in the bin contained pants.

He slung the biggest one over his right shoulder, grabbed the two smaller bags with his left hand, and walked over to the Delicates area.

“Three bags of pants here,” he said to Amanda, “where do you want them?”

“You’re going to have to wait a sec,” Amanda said, emptying a bag onto the table.

She went over to a co-worker and started talking to her.

“Hey, I got other work to do!” Floyd yelled, holding the bags up. “Where do you want this?”

“I said ‘hold on!’” Amanda yelled, going back to talking to her co-worker.

Floyd shook his head, put the bags on the table, and walked away.

He heard Amanda yell “YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE!”

He pulled the empty bin outside and lined it up with the other one.

He dragged a bin inside containing six bags of meat coats.

He took the bags out, stretched, and opened up the first one.

He took out a coat, held it up with one hand, and felt it up with the other.

He threw the coat in the bin and dug out another coat to inspect.

Mason called Floyd into his office half an hour later over the intercom.

He finished checking the final two coats and went upstairs.

“Spicer, we have a problem,” Mason said, reaching behind his desk. He held up a sandwich bag containing two pens. “These were found in the wash yesterday.”

“Well, it probably wasn’t my fault then,” Floyd said.

“How so?”

“You had me working in Soil the entire shift yesterday. Shane was sorting through the bins. Did you talk to him?”

“He’s next. The thing is, another load is ruined, which means Vollmann’s has lost money. I’m trying to decide if I should take these fuck-ups out of your paycheck.”

“Take it out of Shane’s then, since it’s from one of his loads.” Floyd pointed at Mason. “This is partially your fault too.”

Mason put down the bag. “Floyd, neither myself nor any of the other supervisors are the ones checking the coats!”

“Yeah, but the new way you told us to check the coats doesn’t work.” Floyd looked around the room. He saw Mason’s jacket hanging on the wall. “May I demonstrate?”

“Go for it.”

Floyd grabbed the jacket and held it up like he would a meat coat.

He took one of the pens he found earlier, and put it in the jacket’s front pocket.



“Okay, this is how I used to do it,” Floyd groped each pocket, emphasizing the pocket that contained the pen. “See? I could find anything—pens, coins, whatever—this way. Now this—,” Floyd grasped the jacket and wrung it like a wet towel, “doesn’t do jack shit. I barely felt the pen—but how can I tell if it’s a pen? It could just be the jackets lining for all I know.”

Mason nodded. “We figured that way would be faster.”

“By what? Two seconds?” Floyd felt up each pocket again. “Four seconds. We can’t make the same amount of progress in four seconds?”

Mason nodded again, looking down at his desk. “Yeah, I think you’re right.”

“So, what do you want me to do?”

“Continue your assignment—do it the way you think works best. It looks like I’m going to have another meeting with the rest of management. Don’t go bragging about how you changed my mind, okay?”

“Gotcha.” Floyd hung the jacket back up. “And for real, Mason, Shane’s the one who fucked up here.”

“I absolutely believe you on that part. I’ll be having a talk with him too, though we probably won’t be taking anything out of his paycheck.”

Floyd imagined Shane getting his check slashed and the freak out that would follow.

“We’re done here. And please, Floyd,” Mason, wide-eyed, pointed at him, “don’t fuck up.”

“Gotcha, boss,” Floyd said, saluting Mason.

Mason saluted him back, and he returned to the work floor

Floyd saw three bags in front of his bin.

He opened them, recognized the contents, picked them up, and brought them back to the Delicates area.

“Where’s Amanda?” he asked the co-worker

Amanda was talking to earlier. The woman shrugged. He put the bags on the table. "Tell her that if she ever disrespects me like this again, or I *will* report her to Mason."

The woman nodded.

Floyd gave her a thumbs up and went back to his work area.

# 3

Floyd pulled out an old issue of *Rolling Stone*.

He looked over to see if Professor Bottrall was still writing notes next to the projection of Lewis Carroll's poem *Jabberwocky*.

He opened the magazine and put it into his textbook.

He turned to the National Reviews section.

"All right everyone, we'll continue working on our children's poems," Bottrall said, turning off the projector. "How's everyone doing? Anyone having any trouble?"

Floyd looked up to make sure Bottrall wasn't looking over his way.

He saw April raise her hand.

He went back to reading as she described her situation.

More students raised their hands.

A student, who sat at the table next to Floyd, raised his hand and asked his question.

Floyd closed the *Rolling Stone* and put it into his backpack.

Bottrall turned around.

She glared at Floyd as he zipped up his backpack, walking towards the student while responding to his question.

She bent down, looked over the students' poem,

and gave him additional advice.

She turned to Floyd. "How's your poem coming along, Spicer?"

"Oh, I've already finished the poetry part," Floyd said.

Bottrall raised her eyebrow. "Which project did you choose?"

"The ten lines/ten illustrations option"

"Oh, so you went with the shorter option."

"Yeah. Is that gonna be a problem?"

Bottrall held out her hand "May I please see it?"

Floyd took the poem out of his folder and handed it to her.

"You already typed it up?" Bottrall asked.

"Yep. Did both drafts on the same day."

Bottrall read it over, and used her pen to mark it up. "This has fourteen lines."

"I know. I tried to shorten it, but found that it would be lacking if I did. I'll finish the illustrations this week."

Bottrall hummed. "It has nice imagery, but I don't get what it's about."

"It's a nonsense poem."

"Obviously. We've been discussing them the past two days."

"I really like the genre. Everything I wanted to say came gushing out."

"Okay, but what's it about?"

"Well, it's a poem about some kittens getting stuffed into a pot, buried underground, and getting dug up later—"

"Hmm..." she tapped the paper with her pen. "That's a little bit violent."

"Not really. I mean, when the pot is opened, a rainbow of butterflies emerge. It's not like the kittens are left to rot."

Bottrall shook the paper. "Did you actually edit this? Or did you leave whatever you spewed

untouched?”

Floyd took out his handwritten first draft, handed it to Bottrall, and folded his arms.

Bottrall held both drafts up and compared them.

She nodded and handed them back to Floyd.

“Your line breaks could use some editing. You might want to take my corrections into consideration.”

Floyd shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, okay.”

Bottrall put her hands on her hips and glared at him. Floyd stared at her.

Bottrall snapped her fingers. “Okay, we’re going to switch up our routine for the rest of the hour. Everyone, get together with another person, and look over each other’s work.”

Someone asked if they could partner up with more than one person.

Bottrall told them they could.

The students started forming groups.

Floyd got out his pen and looked over the corrections Bottrall made.

“Are you going to do as you’re told?” Bottrall asked him.

Floyd looked up. “I really don’t like forcing myself on others.”

Bottrall looked around. “April needs a partner.” Bottrall pointed towards her. “Go for it.”

Floyd gathered his stuff and walked over.

April didn’t notice him as he stood next to her table.

“Hey, Bottrall told me to team up with you,” Floyd said. April, startled, looked up from her paper. “You cool with that?”

“Oh, sure!” April said, straightening herself. “I’m really have a hard time with this.”

Floyd sat down. “What’s your dilemma?”

“You didn’t hear me asking the Professor about it?”

“No, I was too busy reading. Sorry.”

She scraped her teeth against her lower lip. “I can’t get my characters voice right.” April handed him the poem.

Floyd scanned the paper. He noted to himself that her style looked like Walt Whitman’s. “What’s it about?”

April explained that the poem was about a vulture who befriends a boy who ran away from home.

The vulture then tells the boy what it believes life is about, which makes the boy decided to return home.

“I’ll take a closer look at yours,” Floyd hand April his poem, “and you take a closer look at mine. At least we’ll look busy enough for Bottrall to leave us alone.”

April nodded and started reading.

Floyd did the same.

April started giggling.

“I’m not hearing enough poetry!” Bottrall yelled. “Start reading aloud!”

Floyd nodded.

April cleared her throat, and began reciting Floyd’s poem:

*One day, a boy was feeling sour,  
So he decided to cheer himself up by growing  
some flowers.*

*He got himself some rats,  
That he laid out in the alley on a mat,  
And waited behind the dumpster for some cats.  
He captured four felines with his net,  
Doused them with water until they were  
completely wet,*

*Then he threw them in a barrel—he was all set!  
He buried them in a field,  
And went home for his evening meal.  
A week later, he dug up the felines,*

*Shook the barrel, and decided it was time.  
He opened it up, and out flew some butterflies.  
The boy, dumbfounded, thought "Again, should I  
try?"*

"Oh man, that is *weird!*" April said. "How long did it take for you to write this?"

"I think twenty minutes or so," Floyd said.

April shook her head. "It took me an entire weekend to finish my poem."

"Compared to me, it seems like you were actually trying. I just wrote a bunch of bullshit that somehow came together to form a story."

"You said this is a 'nonsense poem'?"

"That's the excuse I'm using. I'm not sure if I did it right."

"The only thing I would recommend you change is the boys thought at the end" April handed Floyd back his draft. "'Again, should I try?' sounds too formal for a young boy."

Floyd nodded. "Gotcha. I have a suggestion for your vulture's dialogue." Floyd handed April back her draft. "You make it sound really whimsical, like a bird from an old Disney cartoon. Try giving the vulture more cynical dialogue."

April nodded, and started chewing her fingernails as she looked over her poem.

Floyd noticed the cracks in her lips.

He imagined how they were created from her gnawing on them.

April looked up. "Okay, but how will that make the kid decide to go back home?"

Floyd scratched his head. "Try making him sound drier. Think Nicolas Cage's usual acting routine."

Floyd leaned over and read one of the vulture's lines, imitating Nicholas Cage's voice.

April laughed.

"See? Try that. Taking away the exclamation

points will help too.”

April nodded, trying to suppress her giggling.

Floyd looked around.

Everyone was looking at them, including Bottrall.

Floyd flashed the corniest grin he could manage.

Children’s Literature was dismissed a few minutes later.

Floyd stuffed his papers into his backpack and stood up.

April tugged on his sweatshirt. “Do you want to hang out later?” April asked.

Floyd’s eyes widened. “Sure. Later today?”

April started putting away her work. “No, I got two more classes today. I’ll be ready to drop tonight. You free tomorrow?”

“Yep. I just have American History in the morning.”

“I have a few classes in the afternoon, and I have the ACC Writers Club at night...” April snapped her fingers. “You should come to the Writers Club meeting!”

“We have a writers club?”

April stood up. “Seven o’clock, in the first meeting room you see to the left when you enter the library.”

Floyd shrugged. “Okay, I’ll see you there.”

Floyd started walking away.

He felt himself be pulled back and held.

He looked down and saw two arms holding his waist.

“Thanks for the help,” April said, letting go. “See you tomorrow night.”

April walked past him and turned right down the hall.

Floyd blinked a few times, and left the classroom.

He felt his backpack sag.

He took it off and zipped it up.



# 4

Floyd finished his slice of pot roast.

The TV started to flicker.

He fiddled with the antenna.

“What’d I say about messing with the antenna?”

Henry said.

The screen came back to normal.

“Oh look, I proved your wrong again,” Floyd said.

Floyd took his plate and silverware to the sink.

He asked his Mom if anything needed to be put away.

Naomi told him he could put away the ketchup, BBQ sauce, and the salt and pepper.

Floyd took the ketchup and BBQ sauce in one hand, and grabbed the salt and pepper in the other. He felt the ketchup bottle slipping.

The bottom of the bottle jerked to the side as he tried to get a better grip on it.

It hit Henry’s glass, dousing his chin and shirt with milk.

“Whoops,” Floyd said, getting a hang of the bottle, “sorry Dad.”

Henry’s lips quivered.

He glared at Floyd.

Floyd looked directly into his eyes.

Naomi and Will froze.

Floyd broke eye contact and looked Henry over.

He saw that Henry's fists were balled and shaking. Floyd flinched as Henry's arm shot over to the side.

He grabbed a handful of napkins and wiped himself off.

He crumbled the napkins and threw them at Floyd's chest.

He got up and left the kitchen.

Floyd quickly put everything away.

Henry slammed his bedroom door, rattling the glassware and ceramics in the kitchen display case.

Floyd saw Will glaring at him as he power walked to his room.

Floyd sat down in his recliner and turned on the television.

He thought about whether it was a good idea to block his door.

He looked at his desk chair, and imagined it giving away at Henry's first attempt at busting in. He looked at his desk.

He imagined pushing it against his door, followed by Henry attempting to get in, becoming enraged, and smashing his way through the top half of door to pound Floyd.

Naomi came in and closed the door.

Floyd ignored her.

"Are you doing okay?" Naomi asked.

Floyd glared. "Obviously not," he said, turning back to his TV.

"Do you have any homework?"

"Nope."

"You and Will both never seem to have any homework." Naomi walked over to Floyd's desk.

"Where's your backpack?"

"In my car."

"Go get it."

Floyd took a deep breath. "Why, Mom?"

"I want to look over the work you've been doing in

class.”

“Yeah, that’s not gonna happen.”

“Oh, yes it is! From now on, you’re going to spread out *all* of your work and books *right* here,” Naomi patted the top of Floyd’s desk, “so I can inspect your assignments.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

“You’re not doing your homework!”

Floyd stood up. “Yes, I am!”

Naomi put out her hand. “Show it to me then.”

“I’m a college student! I don’t need this shit!”

“Go get your backpack, now.”

“Oh, fuck off!”

Naomi attempted to slap Floyd.

Floyd blocked her right hand.

She wound up and smacked him with her left.

Floyd pushed her away. “Enough!”

“This is why you bombed out of Northwestern! You need help!”

Floyd grabbed Naomi’s arm. “Get out!”

Naomi tried to jerk away.

Floyd got behind her, gripped her shoulder, and began pushing her.

She dug her feet into the carpet.

Floyd opened the door and shoved Naomi into the hallway, slamming his door before she could turn around.

Floyd held the knob and braced himself against the door.

He heard Naomi walk away.

He put his forehead against his mirror and tried to calm himself.



# 5

Floyd and Edward watched Shane kick the trash cans around.

“You would think that he would have gotten in trouble by now,” Floyd said, pointing at the camera that he was told could broadcast all the way to Vollmann’s Linen Services’ headquarters in Kalamazoo.

“As long as he’s not stealing or busting any equipment up, I don’t think any of the big guys care,” Edward said.

Shane yelled “FUCKING BULLSHIT!” and kicked a small wastebasket into the air.

It flew across the room and hit one of the front loaders.

“SHANE!” Edward yelled, walking over. “Cut that shit out!”

“Sorry,” Shane said, breathing heavily.

“You want to rage out before the shipments arrive? Fine, act like a fucking baby. But the minute you start causing heavy damage, I get in trouble!”

“Heavy damage? That little thing didn’t do shit!”

“Shut the fuck up!” Edward pointed at the garage door. “Get over there, and wait like the rest of us!”

Shane shook his head.

“Hey, shithead,” Edward said, clapping his hands, “you forget that I’m a supervisor now? Get over by

the fucking door!"

Shane started walking towards the door. "Some people," he said as he neared Floyd, "the power goes right to their heads."

Floyd rolled his eyes.

Shane stopped and glared at him. "You got a problem with me?"

"I thought it was established long ago that I have a beef with you," Floyd said.

"MOVE!" Edward yelled as he was putting the trashcans back in place.

"Little faggot," Shane said, walking past.

"Stupid drunk," Floyd replied as he watched Edward examine the front loader.

Floyd swiped the maggots off the table and dumped another bag.

He was relieved when gloves came out instead of bloody meat coats.

He started sorting them.

A hand suddenly grabbed his wrist and twisted it.

"THAT'S WHERE ALL THE WOOLS GO!" Shane yelled, tightening his grip.

Floyd yanked his arm away.

He threw a punch, smashing Shane in the teeth.

Shane staggered back, holding his mouth.

Floyd shook his hand.

"STOP IT!" Jared said, getting between them and extending his arms. "This won't work out for either of you guys!"

"I don't need a retard like you lecturing me," Shane said, running his tongue over his lips.

They heard a whistle.

They looked over at Edward, hands on his hips, standing at the entrance of Soil.

"All right, what are you three arguing about?" he asked.

"Floyd assaulted me," Shane said, spitting.

“He grabbed my wrist first,” Floyd said, holding up his arm. “Look!”

Edward entered the work area and examined the red marks Floyd pointed out.

Floyd turned his arm to show Edward the fingernail indentations.

“Did you sock him?” Edward asked.

“Fuck yeah, I smashed his ugly face,” Floyd said, showing him his left fist.

Two knuckles had drops of blood coming out of the scrapes.

“This dumbass was putting the wools in with the polyesters” Shane said

“You had no right to grab me!”

“If I didn’t grab you, you would have gone on to fuck everything up like you usually do.”

“FUCK YOU!” Floyd tried to charge at him, but was held back by Edward and Jared.

“Young shits like you are the problem here,” Shane said. “You never learn how to do your jobs properly, and guys like me get punished for it.”

“Look at this shit, motherfucker,” Floyd pointed at the glove pile. “How can you even tell the difference?” Floyd grabbed a handful. “They all feel the same, and they’re all white!”

Shane laughed. “If you can’t tell the difference between fabrics, then you should have your daddy get you a job at McDonalds.”

Floyd threw the gloves at Shane.

Edward grabbed him by the arm and turned him around. “Come on, Floyd,” he said, putting his arm around his shoulders. Edward led him out of Soil. “You can go sort the oil rags, then whatever meat coats we have left over.”

“He started this, Ed.”

“I know, and it was caught on camera, remember?” Edward pointed at the camera as he led him outside. “Shane’s been stomping on thin ice for

awhile now. I'll talk with Mason. This *might* be his final nail."

"Good to hear."

Edward pointed at his hand. "You need medical attention."

They stepped outside. "I'm good. The fresh air will heal me."

"All right, let me know if you need anything, bud."

Floyd watched Edward go back inside.

He looked over at Soil and saw Shane arguing with Jared.

Shane threw his hand up like he was going to smack him.

Jared flinched, and backed away.

Shane laughed and gave him the finger.

Floyd's blood boiled.

He walked into the Pit, licking his knuckles.

He thought about what pile of rags he should start on.

He looked up at the trees and saw a crow watching him.



# 6

Floyd entered the library.

He stood at the entrance, trying to remember where the group met.

He remembered the meeting rooms in the back and started walking to them.

April appeared in front of the conference room next to the computer lab. "Floyd! Wrong way!"

Floyd turned around. "My bad," he said, walking over. "I haven't been in here since high school."

"High school?" April ushered Floyd in.

"Yeah, I took two classes that I completely bombed." He gave her a thumbs up. "But I did come here during my lunch breaks." Floyd sat down "The internet here has fewer restrictions too."

April swept her arm across the room. "Okay, welcome to the ACC Writers Club! Everyone, this is Floyd..." April hummed. "I forgot what your last name is."

"Spicer."

"Floyd Spicer!"

Three men and a woman all greeted Floyd and told him their names.

April sat down next to Floyd. "What did you bring to share?"

"I brought some Bukowski," Floyd showered her his copy of *The Last Night of the Earth Poems*, "and

some Ginsberg.” He showed her his copy of *Collected Poems: 1947-1980*.

“Never heard of either of them. Any of your own writing?”

“Nah, I’m not really the creative writing type. I’m more interested in writing Non-Fiction and Journalism. I do dig a lot of poets, though I’m not really good at writing poetry.”

“That nonsense poem you wrote seems to indicate some talent.”

“More of an indication of a tendency to do hack work, you mean.”

“Do you write for *The Crosscut*?” the other woman in the group, Tanya, asked.

She moved over to the empty seat next to Floyd.

“Nope. I’ve thought about it though, but I’m just not motivated to try it. I’m thinking about applying for a position at Western Michigan University’s student newspaper when I move to Kalamazoo next year.”

Tanya’s looked Floyd over.

Floyd sat up straight in his chair.

He thought about how deep her voice was.

“What’s up?” Floyd asked.

“Oh, I’m sorry for interrupting your story, but where are you originally from?” Tanya asked.

“Born and raised here in Alpena. Why?”

“You have an accent.”

Floyd rolled his eyes. “No, I have a deep voice. *You* sound like the one with an accent.”

“I had hearing problems as a child that made it so that I had a hard time hearing how words were properly pronounced.”

Floyd narrowed his eyes. “By ‘hearing problems’, does that include constant ear infections and getting tubes put in?”

Tanya nodded her head.

“How about speech therapy?”

Tanya nodded again. "Yes. You had it too?"

"All three."

There was a knock on the door.

Bottrall smiled and nodded, her arms filled with books and folders.

"Good evening, everyone," she said, setting her supplies on the table. "Are we ready for another exciting night of literary ventures?"

Everyone said "YES".

Bottrall noticed Floyd.

Her face soured.

"Oh, we have a guest," Bottrall sat down. "What brings you here, Spicer?"

Floyd grinned. "Got invited. From the group's description, it seems like it would be something I would dig."

Bottrall picked up one of her books. "Welcome to the group, then. Let's start tonight with original work. Anyone got any writing they would like to share?"

One of the guys shared a poem.

Everyone applauded.

After a few moments of silence, Bottrall asked if there was any other original work to share. Everyone shook their heads.

"Let's move onto our favorite writers."

Bottrall held up a copy of *In Cold Blood*.

She described how influential Capote had been on her work, and how she had been working on her own True Crime book for nearly as long as Capote did his.

She read from one of her favorite chapters, stopping occasionally to describe the context of the passage and why she liked it.

Afterwards, April read a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay that she said she found online, and one of the guys read an essay by P.J. O'Rourke.

"Anyone else?" Bottrall asked.

Floyd held up his copy of *The Last Night of the Earth Poems*. “I got some Bukowski that might be of interest.”

Bottrall rubbed her chin. “Why do you like Bukowski?”

Floyd flipped through the book. “This is one of my all-time favorite poems by him. It’s called ‘The Bluebird’.”

“I asked you why you like him. Care to explain?”

Floyd looked around.

He shrugged his shoulders.

“I got into Bukowski my senior year of high school. I bought *Post Office* in Petoskey, and I read it in one day. What I like about Bukowski is that he views the absurdities of life like I do—with rage and humor.” Everyone nodded and hummed. “He gets pissed, but he has enough of a sense of humor about him that he doesn’t let it totally get him down. He’s also straight forward in his prose, which is the type of writing I prefer rather than a lot of the writing today that goes every which way.”

“You sound like you concentrate more on the man than his writing,” Bottrall said, sitting back in her chair, crossing her arms.

“Well, no, but his life was so intertwined with his work...” Floyd stalled, snapping his fingers. “I like how he could turn his crappy life into an adventure.”

“Judging by your work in class, you don’t really write like him.”

“Yeah, but it’s a Children’s Lit class. You wouldn’t accept any of my work if they were like Bukowski’s.”

Bottrall rolled her eyes. “Okay, read the poem.”

Cunt, Floyd thought.

He shifted in his chair and cleared his throat.

He started reading.

He stuttered near the middle of the poem.

He apologized, and continued reading.

The final line was slightly smudged.

Floyd put the book up closer to his face and finished the poem.

Everyone clapped. "Sorry, the last line was hard to read," Floyd said.

"We're going to have to cut this week's meeting short, everyone," Bottrall said, texting. "My nephew needs to be picked up. Anyone else, quickly?"

Silence.

Floyd reached into his bag and pulled out his other book.

"I got a Ginsberg poem we could use to close this night out," he said.

"This meeting isn't all about *you*," Bottrall said. "Give someone else a chance."

Nobody said anything else.

Bottrall packed her bags. "Okay, you're all dismissed. See you next week."

Floyd watched Bottrall go out the library entrance.

He turned to April. "I don't think this club is right for me."

"I'm really sorry," April said. "I thought she would act differently outside the class."

"You must think more highly of her than I do."

They walked out with everyone else.

"Are you busy tonight?" Tanya asked.

"No, it's just going to be another exciting night of Facebook and Adult Swim."

"Come watch movies with us! We're going to watch *Hostel*."

"You two live together?" Floyd asked. Tanya and April nodded. "I'm down. Where do you guys live?"

"The College Park Apartments, next to the Fine Arts Center."

Floyd put on his backpack. "Nice."



# 7

Floyd was called into Mason's office.

Mason motioned for him to sit down, and he went back to typing.

Floyd balled his fists, and looked around the office.

Mason lifted his finger and dramatically hit the Enter button.

"Spicer, all the signs and warnings have come to pass," Mason said, folding his hands together.

"So, all the shit talk on the floor is actually true?" Floyd asked.

"I'm really sorry about this, bud. If it wasn't for seniority, I'd keep you on instead of some of these pricks around here."

"It's cool. I just have two questions."

"Sure."

"This is just a layoff, right? I'm not getting canned?"

"Yes, this is just a layoff. I'll personally call you when we're able to have you on schedule again."

"Good. And how could we not have a lot of business this time of year? Fall is usually booming."

"Can't be helped. It happened down at the Kalamazoo headquarters, which means it was gonna happen here."

Floyd nodded.

Mason stood up and extended his hand. "I'm sorry, Spicer. I wish things were different." Floyd shook his hand. "Keep your head up, and concentrate on school. If you get another job offer, take it. Don't let us hold you back."

"Thanks much, Mason."

Floyd exited the office.

He took off his apron as he walked down the stairs.

He draped it over his shoulder, took off his gloves, and ran his fingers through his hair.

He put it all in the work closet and slammed the door.

He saw Shane glaring at him from Soil.

He ignored him and kept going.

He clocked out, and started putting on his hoodie.

Shane appeared in front of him after he pulled his hoodie down.

He was grinning.

"I see you got shit canned," Shane said.

"No, I got laid off."

"Sure you did. Maybe you shouldn't have been such a fuck up—then you wouldn't be heading for the food stamp line."

Floyd nudged Shane out of his way.

He power walked back the way he came.

"Hey, if you want to throw down, you're going the wrong fucking way!" Shane yelled, following Floyd.

Floyd saw Amanda shaking her head and smiling as they passed.

Shane took off his apron and gloves and threw them on the Soil table.

Floyd walked up the staircase.

"COME ON, FAGGOT!" Shane yelled, one leg on the bottom stair, both hands on the rails.

Mason gave Floyd a confused look when he stepped inside.

"Hey, I know you just laid me off," Floyd said,



“but can I still file a harassment complaint against Shane?”

“Absolutely!” Mason said, getting up from his desk and walking to the office windows. “What did he do this time?”

“He came up to me after I clocked out and started running his mouth,” Floyd said as he and Mason looked down at Soil.

Jared was sorting, and Shane was putting his gloves back on.

“He’ll get written up again,” Mason hummed. “I might just suspend him.” Mason looked at Floyd. “Anything else you would like to report?”

“This incident did jog my memory.”

“Do tell.”

“Ed told me this during break a few weeks ago. Shane was bragging to him about how he picks on Jared, calls him stuff like ‘Christian Faggot’, says that his wife is as smart as a bag of—“

Mason faced Floyd. “Jared and I have known each other since we were kids. He’s a good guy.”

“This is all what Ed told me.”

“I’ll have to consult Edward on this matter.”

Mason looked out the window, glaring hard.

“He talked shit about Jared’s daughter too—said she was paying for college on a ‘retard scholarship’, and that he hoped that she would get gang raped at a frat party.”

Mason closed his eyes, moving his mouth from side to side.

Floyd looked back down at Soil.

Shane threw an empty bag across the floor, and stared at the pile in front of him.

Mason took a deep breath, and looked at Floyd. “I know his daughter, too. She’s brighter than all of us in this building combined. She’s gonna go somewhere in life.”

“Jared told me the same thing, that she’s part of

some kind of advanced linguistics program.”

Mason nodded. “Thank you, Spicer. You’ll want to get out of here now—I might just turn this place into a blood bath.”

“All right, hope to hear from you soon.”

Mason did not acknowledge Floyd’s farewell.

Floyd walked back down the stairs.

Instead of going through the entrance, he went out through the garage door.

He waved to Edward, who was tinkering with the lawn mower, as he made his way to his car.

# 8

Floyd waited with Tanya and April outside their apartment for Austin to show up.

Floyd told them about how he got laid off.

“He sounds like the most despicable person ever,” Tanya said, adjusting her cat ears.

“Shane’s probably in the top ten,” Floyd said. “I highly suggest you avoid manual labor jobs if you can afford it.”

He thought about which one he wanted to flirt with later.

A rusty truck pulled up in front of the apartment.

A man wearing a bucket hat stepped out.

He started walking towards them, stopped, looked at the sky, and turned around and checked to see if his truck door was locked.

“Austin?” Floyd asked, pointing at the man.

“The only one like him in this town,” April replied.

“After many delays,” Austin hugged Tanya and April, “here I am!” He slapped hands with Floyd. “So, I know they’re cat girls, but I have no idea what you’re supposed to be. No offense.”

Floyd wore khakis, a dress shirt, a clip on tie, and a trench coat.

“I’m Arthur Rimbaud.”

Austin looked at him strangely.

“Famous French poet, one of my personal heroes.

I tried to model myself after Leonardo DiCaprio's depiction of him in *Total Eclipse*."

"You look more like Constantine."

"Constantine?" Floyd tilted his head. "The Roman emperor?"

"What? No, he's a comic book character."

"Never heard of him."

Austin patted his shoulder. "Google *Hellblazer* later." He looked over at April. "Do you mind if I use your kitchen table for a sec?"

"Sure, we don't have to leave right away," April said.

They went into the apartment.

Austin took out his phone and entered the kitchen.

Floyd sat on the couch and picked up a *National Geographic* that was on the coffee table.

April and Tanya went upstairs to check their makeup.

Fifteen minutes later, Floyd tossed the magazine back on the table.

He went into the kitchen.

Austin had his head down underneath the faucet.

His phone rang.

Austin stood up, putting the phone to his ear

"You got the pic?" he asked the person on the other end. He wiped his mouth. "Will that do? Good! I'll see you tonight, bro."

Austin turned to the table and put a twist tie on a small plastic bag.

"What's that?" Floyd asked.

"Give it a sniff," Austin tossed him the bag.

Floyd looked it over.

He slightly unwound it, put his nose in it, and sniffed it. "Is this weed?"

Austin smiled and nodded. "You smoke?"

"No, but my dorm mate back in Traverse did."

Floyd tied it up and tossed it back. "I always thought he was hanging out someplace with a lot of incense."

Austin laughed. "That's weird, bro."

They went into the living room.

Austin called up for Tanya and April.

They ran down, their noses now black and their whiskers more vibrant.

"Who's going with whom?" Floyd asked, taking off his trench coat as they walked out the door. "I have no clue where Megan's house is."

"We're all going together, aren't we?" Tanya asked.

"Yeah, you said I could roll with you guys," Austin said. "That's cool, right?"

Floyd stopped himself from saying 'Yeah!'

He nodded to Austin to follow him.

They walked up to the door step.

"Are you taking that weed with you?" Floyd asked.

"Yeah, totally." Austin frowned. "You got a problem with this?"

"Well, yeah. I don't want to get in trouble for having weed on me."

"Why would you get in trouble? *I'm* the one carrying."

"You'll be in my car! Cops are gonna be everywhere tonight, and if I get pulled over with you carrying that shit, I'll be fucked!"

"No way, you're being way too paranoid."

"Why don't you take your truck, then?"

"My trucks a piece of shit. I don't think it could handle a trip outside of Alpena."

Floyd bit his lip. "Come on, dude, just leave it here. It's my car we're taking, so please respect my wishes."

Austin glared at him.

He walked to his truck, opened the passenger's side door, and pretended to put the weed in the glove compartment.

He slammed the door. "WE GOOD?" he yelled.

"Yeah! Thanks, man. I appreciate it."

Austin stomped over to Floyd's car.

He got in the back and slammed the door.

Tanya and April looked at Floyd.

Floyd shrugged, and they got in.

They drove into Ossineke.

Tanya, who was sitting in the front passenger's seat, pointed out Megan's house to Floyd.

They pulled in, and Tanya and April dashed out.

They started banging on the door.

Floyd and Austin got out.

Floyd noticed that, while his face softened, Austin was ignoring him.

A blonde woman dressed like Princess Leia answered the door.

She screamed, and hugged Tanya and April.

She then hugged Austin.

April introduced Megan to Floyd.

They shook hands, and Megan invited them inside.

They joined Megan's friends in the living room.

They sat in a circle on the floor discussing each other's costumes, what bars were having Halloween parties, and described what they did earlier in the day.

Megan said her group went to the Dark Minds yearly haunted house at the National Guard Armory.

April said she, Tanya, and Floyd caught the latest *Saw* film at the State Theatre.

Floyd sat over on the couch.

He checked his Facebook.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder.

A large Goth girl covered in glitter stood above him.

"Hi, Megan said you're Floyd Spicer?" the girl asked.

"Yep, I'm Floyd. You are?"

"Peggy." She sat down on the recliner. "I know your cousin."

Floyd tensed up. "Donovan?"

"Do you know what he did last month?"

"We're not close. I don't even like him."

"He tried stealing milk from the Shell station near Family Video."

"Milk? I thought he would try stealing bigger shit."

"I was there. The clerk caught him. He pushed me out of the way when he made a run for it. I nearly smashed my head into the freezer."

Floyd coughed. "Shit, are you all right?" he asked, coughing more in an attempt to conceal his laughter.

"I got a huge bruise from where I was slammed into the door handle."

Floyd nodded. "Okay."

They stared at each other.

Peggy scratched the corner of her eye.

Floyd looked over at everyone else, who were eating cookies.

"I'm also friends with a girl he used to date," Peggy said.

Floyd slouched. "All right."

"He started stalking her after they broke up. She told me she got a restraining order put on him after he threatened to come over and kill her while she was sleeping."

Floyd shrugged. "Okay."

Peggy twiddled her thumbs.

Floyd glared at her. "I don't get why you're telling me all this."

"I thought you would know."

"I told you, we're not close, and I don't like him, meaning I don't keep up with his affairs." Peggy looked straight ahead.

"It sounds like you got a problem with me."

"I thought you would be concerned about his behavior." Peggy said in a monotone voice.

"Well, I'm not. I don't give a shit about what he does."

Peggy got up, went down the hall, and entered the bathroom.

Floyd growled.

He overheard Megan ask, "Has the costume contest started yet?"

"An hour from now," Megan's friend said, looking at her phone.

"TO THE TRACTOR TREAD!" Megan shouted, jumping up.

Everyone headed outside.

Megan tapped Floyd on the arm as he walked by.

"Have you seen Peggy anywhere?"

Floyd shook his head. "Nope, no clue."

They heard the toilet flush.

Megan went down the hall.

Floyd went outside.

"Let me see your wrist," Megan said, grabbing Floyd's hand and lifting it up. She frowned. "Shoot, you have a wristband too."

"Sorry," Floyd sipped his water, "come see me in a year or so, and I'll get you any drink you desire."

Megan shook her empty Mountain Dew can. "I'm in need of one now."

"THAT I can help you out with."

Floyd signaled the bartender and pointed at the can.

The bartender bent down, retrieved a Mountain Dew, and slid it across the counter.

He put up two fingers.

Floyd gave him two dollars.

"Thank you," Megan said, taking a swig. She sighed, and wiped her mouth. "We didn't really talk much at my house. What're you supposed to be?"



"I'm Arthur Rimbaud."

"Is that an actor?"

"No, he's a French poet."

Megan sipped her Mountain Dew. "Never heard of him."

The host of the party announced that the costume contest would start in 10 minutes.

"Are you entering?" Megan asked.

"Hell no! Nobody knows who I even am. How am I supposed to win?"

"Good point."

"How about you, Leia?"

"I'm still thinking about it."

"Anyone else going to?" Floyd nodded towards the table where everyone was sitting.

"Doesn't look like it."

"You should go for it. You got the look down perfectly."

"Except for the hair, though."

"You got the whole bun thing going on."

"But I'm blonde!"

"That's no big deal—just say you're the Dutch version of Leia, then."

Megan laughed.

Some Mountain Dew dribbled onto her dress.

"Oh, no," she said, trying to steady herself, "my mom's sheet is ruined!"

"Don't worry, we can still salvage your costume." Floyd looked her directly in the eye. "You wouldn't by chance be dressed as slave Leia underneath that sheet, would you?"

Megan covered her mouth. "NO!"

"Never mind, then. You can still enter if you're cool with second or third place."

"Thanks, you're real sweet."

The contest started.

Megan stayed behind and continued talking to Floyd.

She told him she just started at ACC.

Floyd told her of his plans to attend WMU the following year.

He noticed an old man wearing a cowboy hat come over and stand next to Megan.

He ordered a beer, and looked her over.

He whistled.

Floyd looked at Megan, who was watching the costume contest.

The man straightened himself, readjusted his belt, and leaned into Megan.

He stared at her.

He lifted his hand to one of her hair buns.

He tapped it.

Megan spun around, and backed away.

"I like your buns, darlin'," the man said, raising his beer, grinning.

"Please don't touch my hair," Megan said, moving closer to Floyd.

The man laughed, put down his beer and advanced towards Megan.

Megan grabbed Floyd by the arm and pushed him in front of her.

"Hey, she's with me," Floyd said. "Do yourself a favor and back off."

The man made a face that Floyd could not tell if it was legit shock, or if he was mocking him.

He looked over Floyd's shoulder at Megan, then he returned Floyd's stare.

"You picked a good one, kid," he said, patting Floyd's arm.

The man turned around, howling with laughter.

Megan took Floyd's hand and led him away.

Floyd looked back at the man, who was guzzling the rest of his beer.

They stood at the head of the table where everyone was sitting.

April noticed them holding hands, and pointed at

them with her half-eaten nacho.

“A creep wouldn’t leave me alone,” Megan said

“I’m just playing along,” Floyd said. He saw an empty chair at the end of the table. “There’s a seat back there.”

“That’s Austin’s,” April said.

“Where is he?”

“No clue.”

Megan squeezed Floyd’s hand. “I’m good here.”

They watched the rest of the contest, which was won by a woman dressed as a zombie Catwoman.

They discussed what to do next.

One of the girls searched for bars nearby that allowed people under 21 to enter.

Peggy announced that she was too tired to go on.

They all decided to call it a night.

Peggy and her friends left together.

Floyd told Megan he could drop her off on their way back.

She agreed, squeezing his hand again.

“Maybe I should call Austin’s phone,” Tanya said, as they waited for him next to Floyd’s car.

Floyd walked away, surveyed the parking lot.

He spotted Austin and another man next to the dumpster.

Austin stuffed some bills into his sweatshirt pocket.

“He’s over here,” Floyd yelled.

He whistled to Austin.

Austin looked over, glared, said goodbye to the man, and shook his hand.

Austin, April, and Tanya piled into the back seat.

Megan sat up front.

She grabbed Floyd’s right hand once he took it off the shifter.

Floyd drove with one hand the rest of the way to her house.

When they pulled into the driveway, Megan

thanked Floyd, squeezed his hand, said goodbye to everyone, and got out.

Back on US-23, Floyd slightly turned up the radio while Austin, April, and Tanya talked and played Youtube videos.

November



# 9

Floyd gave up trying to tune his stereo to 106 KHQ.

He re-crossed his legs and sat in the lotus position.

He cupped his hands, closed his eyes, and slowed his breath.

He watched the darkness for a minute.

Will bashed the door open.

“Hey, there’s a girl here that wants to talk to you,” he said, handing Floyd his cell phone.

He slammed the door shut.

Floyd didn’t recognize the number.

He held it up to his ear, listening for a voice on the other end.

He just heard breathing.

He cleared his throat. “This is Floyd.”

“Hey, it’s Megan. I thought for a sec that April gave me the wrong number.”

Floyd sat down in his recliner. “That was my brother. Being the dick that he is, I’m surprised he didn’t tell you to fuck off.”

Floyd heard Megan laughing on the other end.

“Oh yeah, how’s life, Megan?”

“I just got out of class. What’re you up to?”

“Absolutely nothing. I had the day off. I did try tuning into a Traverse City station I like, with no

luck. I was just about to start examining my posters, since I have so much ‘absolutely nothing’ going on.”

“What station?”

“KHQ. I lived in Traverse for a bit, studying at Northwestern Michigan College. I failed a good portion of the classes, so I’m back here now. Listening to KHQ reminds me of better times.”

“Oh.”

Silence.

Floyd realized what he had just said.

He mentally chastised himself.

“So, does that mean you got nothing going on tonight?” Megan said.

Floyd snapped out of his trance. “Nope, nothing.”

“I’m going to be at April and Tanya’s tonight after my night class, and I really want to see you again. Do you want to see me?”

Floyd pumped his fist. “Oh, fuck yeah!”

“Good! We’re going to watch *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and order pizza.”

Floyd’s phone beeped.

The battery symbol was flashing.

“My phone’s about to die. What time?”

“Eight.”

“I’ll be there.”

“What kind of pizza do you want?”

“I’m good with anything. Hold on, let me go get my charger.”

“It’s okay, I’ll talk to you later tonight, then.”

Floyd felt nervous.

He scratched his head.

“Awesome. See you tonight.”

They both said “Bye” at the same time.

Floyd hung up, and stared at his phone.

His hand was shaking.

He calmed down, and went into the kitchen.

He got a popsicle and grabbed his charger.

Will looked up from his bowl of Cheerios.



"That your girlfriend?" Will asked.

"Not yet," Floyd said.

"It won't work out after she finds out you're gay."

Floyd glared at him. "Go do your math homework."

"Don't have any."

"Keep failing high school, then."

Floyd walked back to his room.

He heard Will laughing.

Floyd noticed that half a pepperoni was stuck to the side of his pizza.

He took it off, flicked it onto the paper plate, and checked the other side of his slice.

"You should have told us that you only liked cheese," Megan said, picking up the pepperoni and tossing it into her mouth.

"It's one of the few remaining picky quirks I have," Floyd said. He took a bite out of his slice. "I don't like to be a bother, especially when I'm not paying for it."

"We could have gotten half-and-half, though."

"This is great! Don't worry about it. You sure you don't want me to pitch in?"

Megan pulled at the cheese with her teeth. "Mmm, hmm," she mumbled, shaking her head. She sucked up the cheese and pepperoni. "We got this."

Tanya came down the stairs, proclaiming that she finally found her copy of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

She yelled at April to "finish crapping!"

April told her to start without her.

Tanya put in the DVD and shut off the lights.

Floyd put his arm around Megan.

She shoved the rest of her pizza into her mouth and snuggled up next to him.

He relaxed, leaned in, and wrapped his other arm around her.

She took his hand and intertwined their fingers.

Near the middle of the film, Floyd got up to use the bathroom.

They continued cuddling when he returned.

When it finished, Tanya and April went upstairs to find another movie.

"You can kiss me anytime, you know," Megan said, watching the credits.

Floyd tipped Megan's head towards him.

Her eyes were closed.

He closed his eyes and kissed her.

Megan placed her hand behind Floyd's head.

Tanya and April ran back down the stairs and put in the next movie.

Floyd and Megan continued making out.

Megan pulled away as the movie started.

She smiled, kissed Floyd on the cheek, and relaxed herself back into his arms.

"What's this?" Megan asked.

"*Road Trip*." Tanya said.

"Haven't seen this in awhile."

"This was one of the first movies I got when I bought my first DVD player," Floyd said, "along with *Blair Witch 2* and *Me, Myself, & Irene*."

There was a knock on the door.

April shouted that the door was unlocked.

"Hey, guys," Austin said, walking in, "sorry for the lateness."

"It's all right," April pointed to the kitchen, "I put your hat on the table."

Austin walked into the kitchen

"Don't know how I forgot it," he yelled.

Austin adjusted his hat as he re-entered the living room.

He saw Floyd.

He glared at him.

"What?" Floyd asked.

Austin turned to Tanya. "I thought you said you

wouldn't invite him over when I was coming around?"

"You didn't say when you were coming over!" Tanya said.

"What's up?" Megan whispered.

"Austin's pissed because I told him I didn't want him having drugs on him when he was riding in my car," Floyd said aloud. "He still didn't respect my request."

"You're a pussy-ass bitch," Austin said.

"Come on, don't do this here," April said, leading Austin to the door. "We'll talk about this later."

Austin pointed at Floyd. "You better hope we don't run into each other again, motherfucker."

Floyd stood up. "Dude, you're a student here too, right? Come at me after one of your classes"

"BYE!" April said, pushing Austin outside and shutting the door.

She rubbed her temple, and plopped down on the bean bag chair.

Megan tugged at Floyd's sweatshirt.

"I thought you guys were friends," Megan said.

Floyd sat down. "Fuck no, he didn't speak a word to me after I confronted him on the weed. He's a fucking asshole."

Megan's phone rang a few minutes later.

She took it out and looked at the screen.

Floyd looked at it as well, seeing the name 'Peggy'.

Floyd rolled his eyes, and went back to watching the movie.

Megan answered her phone.

She said "Hi" to Peggy, and asked her what she was up to.

Floyd heard Peggy on the other end tell Megan to come outside.

Megan asked her why she couldn't inside.

Peggy said it was "Urgent".

Megan told her she'll be out in a minute, and hung

up.

Megan sat up and stretched. "I'll be back."

"We got two slices left," Tanya said. "I'm going to have this one. You want the other?"

Megan opened the door.

"No, go for it," she said, going outside and closing it.

They went back to watching the movie.

Floyd sat up.

From his position, he could see part of the parking lot though the shade gap.

He leaned over.

He saw Megan talking to Peggy, who was standing in front of Austin's truck.

Austin sat in his truck, smoking.

Peggy's eyes were wide.

She was talking frantically and pointing towards the apartment.

He saw Megan biting her nails.

She nodded as Peggy continued talking.

Peggy then got into the truck and scooted over.

Megan got in, closed the door, and Austin drove them away.

"Hey, where's she going?" Floyd said, getting up.

"Who?" April asked.

"Megan. She just hopped into Austin's truck and they went off."

April got up and opened the door.

She looked around.

"That's really weird. Let me give her a call."

April closed the door and dialed Megan's number.

Floyd stuck his hands in his sweatshirt pockets and paced.

Tanya gave him a confused look.

He shrugged.

He picked up the final slice of pizza.

He took off the pepperoni, and took a bite out of it.

# 10

Floyd was awakened up by the phone.  
He stared at his ceiling until it stopped.  
He closed his eyes and immediately went back to sleep.

He was awakened again by his door opening.  
He kept his eyes closed.

“Hey, wake up,” Naomi said, rubbing Floyd’s arm.  
Floyd opened one eye, seeing her outline.

“What, Mom?”

“That was Mason on the phone.”

“Oh?” Floyd sat up on his elbow. “He wants me to come back to work?”

“No, he wants you to meet him and everyone else at this office building on Campbell Street at noon. Vollmann’s is burning down.”

“Wait, what the fuck?” Floyd swallowed. “What you do mean ‘burning down’?”

“Mason said it caught fire nearly an hour ago. I listened to the scanner—firefighters are still at the scene.”

Floyd rubbed his eyes. “Shit. Does he want me to call him back?”

“No, he just told me to tell you to be there at noon.” Naomi gently pushed Floyd down. “Do you want me to wake you up later?”

“No, I’ll set my alarm.”

Naomi bent over and kissed Floyd on the forehead.

“Okay, sweetie, try to get some sleep. It’ll be all right.”

Naomi closed the door as quietly as possible.

Floyd stared at the ceiling again.

He sighed, reached over to his alarm, set it for 10 a.m., and turned himself over onto his stomach.

All the workers lined the wall of the office building, waiting for Mason to appear.

Floyd stood next to Edward, catching up.

According to Edward, besides Shane being suspended, no major changes occurred before the fire.

Floyd looked over at Shane, who was in the corner, crouching with a cigarette in his mouth.

Shane looked around once, made eye contact with Floyd, and went back to staring into space.

Mason came out of the office, clipboard in hand.

Floyd noticed he had a large coffee stain streaking down the right side of his dress shirt.

Mason put the hand he held the clipboard with behind his back.

He ran his other hand through his hair.

“Morning, guys,” he said. He looked around, shook his head, and cleared his throat. “You received your calls. You’ll hear about it more on the local news tonight, or you possibly drove by the building this morning, so I’ll be brief.”

He held the clipboard in front of him again and started walking around the room.

“Someone left one of the big dryers on last night, and it caught fire. We are now located here for the time being, until the Kalamazoo headquarters says otherwise. Also, until we are given the go-ahead, our operations will only consist of being a pit stop for shipping operations between the U.P. and Cadillac.

The only people we are keeping here are management, office personal, and team members who are particularly trained to deal with delivery operations.”

“So, you’re only talking about those of us who know how to drive truck?” Amanda asked.

Floyd snorted.

“Yes. Everyone else, I’m sorry, but this is it.”

Everyone started talking amongst themselves.

Mason took a deep breath, and checked his phone.

He put it away and called for everyone’s attention.

“Again, I’m sorry. This wasn’t my decision. But I can promise you that, if you put me down as a contact on your resume, I’ll give you a glowing recommendation.”

Shane raised his hand.

“How about unemployment benefits?”

Floyd rolled his eyes.

Mason glared at Shane. “I don’t know anything about that. You’ll have to go down to the unemployment office and figure that out for yourselves.”

“Well, that fucking sucks,” Shane stood up. “The State doesn’t give you jack shit.”

“That’s your problem, Shane, not mine.”

Shane walked across the room, head down.

Floyd grinned as he passed.

Shane kicked the wastebasket next to the door and exited the building.

“Well, that’s all I have to say,” Mason said. “If you have any questions regarding your final checks, talk to Norma and Stella at their work stations.” Mason pointed to Norma and Stella, who smiled and waved. “I wish you all the best of luck.”

Some started a line in front of the Norma and Stella’s desks.

Others headed to the door.

Floyd stretched his legs and started to leave.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Jared talking with Mason.

Mason put his arm around Jared's shoulder and escorted him into his office.

Floyd skipped around the holes in the unpaved parking lot on the way to his car.

He heard someone yell "SPICER!"

He turned around and saw Shane coming towards him.

He muttered "Fuck".

Shane took his cigarette out of his mouth and held it up.

"Hey, you got a light?"

"No, I don't smoke."

"Shit. I thought you did."

"No, I don't."

Shane put the cigarette in his jacket pocket.

"I just wanted to apologize for the way I've been treating you lately."

Floyd crossed his arms "Oh, really?"

"Yeah, I was out of line. I've been dealing with a lot of shit at home. Being suspended didn't help."

"I don't care, Shane."

Shane bit his lip.

"I'm trying to make amends, okay? I don't want there to be any animosity between us."

"I fucking hate you, Shane." Floyd poked Shane in the chest. "I'm glad you got suspended, and now fired. If you were to drop dead or get killed, I would be *absolutely* ecstatic."

They stared at each other.

Floyd briefly broke off eye contact and looked behind Shane.

A few of his former co-workers were in small groups, talking amongst themselves and smoking.

"Anything else you got to say?" Floyd asked, looking back.



Shane walked away.

Floyd got into his car.

He looked through his CD case and picked out Insane Clown Posse's *The Amazing Jeckel Brothers* album.

He looked up and saw that Shane was talking to Amanda.

He skipped over to the song "Fuck the World".

He slowly drove through the parking lot.

Amanda said something as she glared at Floyd.

Shane turned around and did the same, smoke coming out of his nostrils.

Floyd pressed down on the gas as he passed them by.

Shane and Amanda covered themselves as pebbles, dirt, and dust flew into their faces.

Floyd got onto Campbell Street, and made a right onto Ripley, barely slowing down to check for oncoming traffic.



# 11

Floyd walked up to the library's main desk and asked if he could exchange his dollar for quarters.

The librarian gave him the change.

He went up to the copy machine, but was stopped by the librarian, who told him that she forgot that it was out of order.

He asked if there was another one around, and was told that there were none.

He asked for an application and left the library, looking at the snow come down through the glass doors.

Floyd walked to the cafeteria.

He got a tray and entered the line.

There was one piece of cheese pizza left.

He grabbed a milk and a chocolate chip cookie, and hoped that no one would take the slice.

He looked over at one of the televisions to see what was on CNN.

Below it was April, Tanya, and Megan eating lunch, surrounded by schoolwork.

Tanya spotted Floyd.

She waved, and motioned him to come over.

Megan looked up and saw Floyd.

She tapped Tanya's shoulder, shook her head, and told her something.

Tanya stopped smiling, and turned back to her meal and work.

Megan propped her book up and lowered her head into it.

The cook asked Floyd if there was a problem with the food.

Floyd shook his head and took the slice.

He paid for the food, stuffed the cookie and milk into his hoodie pocket, and put the tray on top of a trash can.

He saw April looking at him.

Floyd nodded, and walked out of the cafeteria while eating the pizza.

Floyd's phone buzzed as the eighth copy of his resume started printing out.

He recognized it as the number he called an hour earlier after checking the job postings at Michigan Works.

"Hello?" he said, walking out of his Grandma Diana's computer room.

"Hi, I'm returning a call made earlier by a Mister Floyd Spicer," the voice on the other end said.

"Yes, this is him."

"Terrific!" Floyd heard some paper shuffling. "This is Leon Robb, from Superior Systems, Incorporated. Since you called only an hour ago, I take it you're still interested in the position we're offering?"

"Absolutely!"

"Great! As part of our newly-formed Alpena branch, you and the other applicants could be the first generation of equipment contractors that our company employs in Northeast Michigan."

"Nice. I'll bring you a copy of my resume. As I said in my message, I have experience setting up and using equipment at the Huron Portland Cement Company, and at my previous job at Vollmann's

Linen Service.”

“Yes, I remember your message.”

“Overall, I’m used to working manual labor, and I do my best at every position I’m placed in.”

“Sounds like you’re the type of worker we’re looking for.”

“I like to think that I am, good sir.”

Robb laughed. “You sound great. And please, I insist you call me Leon. Superior Systems is a pretty informal place.”

Donovan tapped Floyd on the shoulder.

He held up one of the recommendation letters Floyd had stapled to his resume, tapping it with his finger.

Floyd shooed him away.

“You still there?” Leon asked.

“Yes, sorry about that. My brother’s dog was trying to get me to pay attention to him.”

“I have a cat at home that does that same thing when I’m working at my home office. I’m very familiar with your struggle.”

“So, Leon, when would you like to interview me? I’m available any day at any time.”

“How about tonight at six?”

“Sure, where at?”

“The library at Alpena Community College. I forgot the name, but it’s the conference room next to the computer lab.”

“Sounds good. Anything else?”

“Nope, I’ll see you tonight, Floyd.”

“Okay, see you then, Leon. Bye.”

Floyd hung up.

Donovan was standing back, near the middle of the hallway.

Floyd glared at him. “What, Don? What were you interrupting me for?”

Donovan handed Floyd his resume and tapped on it. “You spelled ‘*especially*’ wrong.”

Floyd snatched the resume away. "This is a recommendation letter from my former manager at the cement plant."

"Yeah, but he spelled it wrong."

"So?"

"It's not good to have misspelling on your resume. Employers judge you based—"

"They're not gonna judge me based on one of my former bosses spelling errors."

"Well, that's what my supervisor at my last job told me."

"You mean the job at Arby's you didn't even last a month at?"

"It wasn't my fault!"

"I'm betting it was." Floyd entered the office. "Fuck off, and leave me alone."

Floyd slammed the door.

He looked at the crumbled resume.

He crushed it into a ball, threw it into the trash can, and started printing out three more copies.

He checked his Facebook.

He looked up April's page, and found Megan's profile.

The page only allowed him to see her profile pic, which was taken on Halloween night.

Floyd logged off and went to Wikipedia.

Before he could type anything, he forgot what he going to search for.

He hummed, tapped the space bar, and leaned back in the chair.

The final copies of his resume finished printing.

Floyd put them in order and stapled them.

He looked back at the computer screen and found the following terms listed in the Wikipedia search bar:

*'Gay Cock'*

*'First Gay Cock'*

*'Black Cock White Mouth'*

Floyd put his arms up and muttered, "Fucking Donovan!"

There was a knock on the door.

"Yes?"

Diana walked in. "How are you making out, sweetie?"

"Got it all printed," Floyd replied, putting the resumes into his backpack.

"Did you have enough paper?"

"Yep, thanks. My printer back home stinks at printing out cover letters."

"I'll have dinner ready in a little bit if you're hungry."

Floyd looked past Diana.

Donovan was on the couch watching television.

"No thanks, Grandma."

"Kurt will be back from his errands soon. He'd probably like to see you."

"I got an interview tonight, though."

"Oh, that's great!"

Floyd scooted himself over to the side.

"Hey," he pretended to cringe. "I found this when I was looking up a writer on Wikipedia."

Diana bent over and looked at the screen.

Her eyes narrowed.

Floyd looked back at Donovan, who was still watching television.

Diana took the mouse and left-clicked on one of the searched items.

She left-clicked a few more times, and stood up.

"Can you erase those for me?" she asked, taking off her glasses and wiping them with her shirt.

"Sure. I just got to check a few more things, then I'm out of here."

"There's no hurry. Take all the time you need."

Diana left the room.

Floyd made sure he was logged out of his Facebook and Gmail.

He attempted to erase the computers history.

He gave up and walked out.

Floyd thanked Diana, denied her request that he stay for dinner again, hugged and kissed her, and left the house.

He walked down the steps and, after taking two steps onto the pavement, started slipping on the ice.

He waved his arms as his legs spread apart.

His right leg slid foreword, and he fell onto his side.

He laid on the ice and growled.

He heard Diana yell "DONOVAN SPICER, YOU COME SIT NEXT TO ME RIGHT NOW!"

"Gotcha," Floyd mumbled, getting up and walking to his car.

"Got you a permit earlier," Henry said, handing the hunting permit to Floyd. "You coming out this year?"

Floyd looked the permit over.

"Yep, though I might have a job after tonight," he set the permit down and picked up his fork, "so I don't how much hunting I'll get to do."

He thought about why his Dad would get him a permit, and then ask him if he was going to hunt.

"That's good to hear. Who's interviewing you?"

"Superior Systems, Incorporated. They're setting up shop on this side of the state." Floyd cut off a chunk of chicken and stuffed it in his mouth. "They're looking for people to set up equipment at work sites."

"Don't choke on your food," Naomi said.

"Sounds like a big opportunity," Henry said. "Do they offer any kind of insurance or benefits?"

"I don't think so," Floyd said.

Henry sat down on the stool next to Floyd.

Out of the corner of his eye, Floyd saw Henry looking him over.



He continued eating.

“You need a haircut,” Henry said.

Floyd rolled his eyes.

Henry put his finger under Floyd’s chin and ran it across his skin.

“You need to shave, too.”

“I shaved yesterday. I’m fine.”

“When you’re job hunting, you need to keep you face shaved, your hair trimmed, and your clothes neat. You never know when someone will call you up.”

“I got all that.”

“What’re you wearing?”

“What I’m wearing right now.”

Floyd finished his dinner.

Henry tugged on Floyd’s sleeve. “Your shirt’s wrinkled.”

Floyd growled. “It’s fine.”

Henry gripped the sleeve and yanked Floyd towards him. “Don’t you growl at me, cocksucker!”

Floyd yanked his arm away.

He got up, walked to the bathroom, locked the door, and sat on the toilet.

He heard someone come down the hall.

He turned on the sink full-blast.

The person walked past.

Floyd brushed his teeth.

He went into his room and retrieved his backpack.

He cleared his throat, and went back to the kitchen.

Henry was talking to Naomi, handing her silverware to put in the dishwasher.

Floyd sneaked past them into the walkway.

He started putting on his shoes.

Henry appeared in the doorway, holding a dress shirt that had a clip on tie attached to it.

“Here, you can wear one of my shirts,” Henry said.  
“For a job like this—”

"I SAID 'I'M FINE'!" Floyd yelled.

"Fine, go ahead like that, then!" Henry turned around and walked away.

Floyd stood up. "This isn't something we have to argue about, you know."

Henry stopped, turned around, and glared. "Oh, we're not fucking arguing. I wouldn't waste my time arguing with you."

Floyd shook his head and walked out the door.

"So, did you guys find this job through Michigan Works too?" Floyd asked the three guys who were in the meeting room with him.

Two of the guys nodded.

The third guy shook his head. "Craigslist."

"I should have tried that out earlier. A lot of jobs around here?"

"Alpena really doesn't get a lot of postings."

"Makes sense."

Leon Robb entered the room.

"Okay, I'm back," he said, shutting the door. "The restroom that's apparently the corner was nearly impossible to find." He noticed Floyd. "You are?"

Floyd stood up and extended his hand. "Floyd Spicer. I talked to you earlier today."

"Ah, Floyd!" he shook his hand. "I should have recognized the accent."

Floyd handed him a folder.

"Here's my resume and letters of recommendation."

"You can give it me afterwards." Robb pushed his hand away. "Now that you're here, we can get started."

Floyd quickly sat down.

Robb fiddled with the projector.

He finally turned it on, and shut off the light.

"Before we begin, I want to know if anyone knows who this man is?" Robb asked, pointing at a

projection of sharp dressed senior citizen with glasses. Everyone shook their head. Robb gave an exaggerated sighed. "It's cool, it's cool. This is Warren Buffet, one of America's greatest businessmen. Superior Systems, Incorporated is a subsidy of Buffet's empire."

The three interviewees nodded.

Floyd raised his hand.

"Yes, Floyd."

"Have you met Buffet before?"

Robb smiled. "Not yet. Give me a few more years, and I should be able to bump fists with him."

Robb used the remote to switch to a projection of Superior Systems, Incorporated's logo.

"As a Buffet subsidy, we believe in giving our employees our all, just as we know that they'll give us there all. By this, we mean you'll be paid between one thousand and two thousand dollars per week, with opportunities for bonuses and spontaneous raises, health insurance, and," Robb tapped the remote twice, skipping the intended image. He went back, projecting the image of a boat, "our twice yearly company cruises!"

One of the interviewees whispered "Whoa!"

Floyd raised his hand again.

"I'll get to your question in a sec, Floyd. We'll go more into these benefits later. Let's talk about the product we'll be selling."

"Selling?" one of the interviewee's asked.

Robb switched to a photo of a vacuum.

"We sell Kirby's. Our main method of doing so is door-to-door. We occasionally get invited to conferences, and our online sales are steadily climbing! As a salesman, you'll roam all the corners of Alpena, and, as our branch's success grows, will head out to the other towns around Northeast Michigan."

Floyd raised his hand again.

Robb held his finger up. "Just get me one more second, Floyd."

Floyd stood up. "What's this vacuum shit about?! Your posting said we would be setting up equipment at work sites!"

"That was just a generalized description, but yes, we do set up *our* equipment, Kirby's, at work sites we are invited to."

"Bullshit! I know what entails setting up equipment at work sites, and this isn't even close!" Floyd turned to the other interviewees. "Is this what you guys had in mind when you contacted him about this job?"

The interviewees stared at him.

Robb slammed the remote on the table.

He walked over and turned on the light.

"Okay, guys," Robb said, addressing the interviewees, "what Floyd is doing here is nothing new. He's attempting to undermine our company by making our employees doubtful. Tell me, Floyd, do you work for a competing company?"

"Are you fucking kidding me?!" He looked at the interviewees and smiled. "YES! I *AM* an agent working for one of your competitors! Not at all your everyday working man who knows what 'setting up equipment at job sites' actually means."

Robb opened the door. "It's time for you to leave."

"My mission has been a smashing success." Floyd extended his hand. "See you around?"

Robb glared at him.

Floyd made a fist. "Bump it?"

Robb pointed out the door.

"This may come as a shock to you, but I bet my fist will feel better bumping against the skin on your hand than it will on your face."

"LEAVE!"

Floyd walked out.

Robb slammed the door behind him.

Floyd saw the light in the room disappear behind the curtain.

He walked up to the counter.

"Excuse me," he said to the woman at the computer, "do you know what the man in the conference room is doing?"

"Yes, he's doing interviews for his company."

"Do you know what his company does?"

The woman hummed. "I know it has something to do with work equipment."

"That's what I thought too. He's actually trying to get us to sell vacuums on commission."

The woman gave Floyd a confused look.

She reached under her desk and took out a folder.

"Has this happened before?"

The woman shook her head as she searched through the folder.

Floyd took out his library application, resume, and letters of recommendation, and put them on the table.

"If you have the time, I would appreciate you checking out my application and resume. I'm very interested in the student librarian position."

The woman looked down at the application, then back at Floyd, and smiled. "Thank you so very much. We'll be in contact sometime this week."

"Thanks. Best of luck in dealing with Leon."

The woman nodded, went to the back office, and began talking to her supervisor.

Floyd exited the library.



Floyd was having trouble getting the plastic covering onto the books.

Ms. Burnham watched him from the front desk.

She saw him about to mess up again, and walked into the back room.

"How's it going back here?" she asked, putting her hand on Floyd's shoulder, leaning down next to him.

"Could be vastly better," Floyd said, handing her the book. "Could you demonstrate again?"

Burnham put the book next to the stack of new arrivals. "It's an art that you'll master in time." She fished out a pair of keys from her pocket. "Could you go collect the books from the drop box?"

Floyd held out his hand. "It would be my pleasure."

Burnham dropped the keys into Floyd's hand. "Okay, just call me if you have any problems checking them in. I'll be in the office."

Floyd walked out of the library.

He stood in front of the drop box.

He examined each key, trying to remember which one opened it.

He shrugged his shoulders, got down on one knee, and started trying each one.

After trying the fourth key, he heard someone stop behind him.

He inserted the fifth key.

The person behind him tapped him on the head.

He turned around, glaring.

“Hey, Floyd,” April said, holding her textbooks up to her chest.

Floyd softened his expression. “Oh, hey April. How’s it going?”

“I’m all right. You work here now?”

Floyd tried the fifth key. “First day.” The key refused to turn. “Well, more like a trial day, but I think I got this job.”

“Oh, cool. That construction job you told me about after class didn’t work out?”

The sixth key opened the drop box.

Floyd muttered “YES!”, and pumped his fist. “No, that was a scam.”

April raised an eyebrow. “How so?”

“Instead of setting up equipment at work sites, these motherfuckers wanted me to sell Kirby vacuums door-to-door.”

April’s eyes widened. “What?”

“That was my initial reaction.” Floyd began taking out the books. “I reported him, turned in my resume for this gig, Ms. Burnham called me in for an interview the next day, and here I am!”

“Congratulations, Floyd. I’m really happy for you.”

“Thanks much.”

Bottrall appeared, greeting April.

Floyd rolled his eyes, and continued stacking the books next to him.

She asked April if she was enjoying the volume of Sexton poems she lent to her.

April nodded, and said she was nearly finished with it.

Bottrall noticed Floyd.

She narrowed her eyes, told April that she would see her in the conference room, and entered the library.

“Did she try burning me with her heat vision?”



Floyd said.

"I seriously can't believe how much she dislikes you," April said.

"Fuck her. I don't care if I pass her class—I'll make it up at WMU. It might not even transfer over!"

"What grade did she give your poem?"

"Bitch gave me a C-, claiming that the lines were still uneven, and that the content and illustrations would 'scare children'. What horseshit."

"Come here," April said, opening herself up. Floyd stood up and hugged her. "Don't let her get to you."

April's textbooks jabbed Floyd's skin.

"I'm good," he said, patting her back. "You're the one who chooses to spend an hour outside of class with her."

"I'm actually thinking of quitting the club at the end of the semester."

"I highly advise that you, and every other member, do just that."

April nodded, waved at Floyd, and entered the library.

Floyd picked up the returned books and did the same.

Floyd finished changing the bags in the garbage cans around the library.

He took the bags outside and tossed them into the dumpster.

On the way back in, he peeked in the drop box to see if there were any newly-returned books.

He went back inside and checked the return slot, which contained some magazines that had to be documented and reshelved.

Burnham was waiting for Floyd when he returned from reshelving the magazines.

"Is this job getting easier for you?" she asked.

Floyd nodded. "It is."

“Does this mean you’re ready to tackle the plastic covers again?” Burnham winked at him.

Floyd froze. “How about sometime in the near future?” A student came up and deposited a magazine in the slot. “It looks like I have more pressing matters to attend to, anyway.”

“Indeed, you do,” Burnham said, pointing.

Another student was standing next to Floyd.

“Hi, can I help you?” Floyd asked.

“You work here?” the girl asked.

“I’m on a trial, but yeah, I do.”

“How can we help you, dear?” Burnham asked.

“I’m in the computer lab right now,” the girl said, “and there’s this guy next to me who’s browsing porn sites.”

Floyd and Burnham looked at each other.

“Thanks for telling us,” Burnham said. “We’ll take care of it. Do you want to move to another computer?”

“No, I’m done for the night. I just thought you would want to know.”

“Thank you, we appreciate your concern.”

“I got this,” Floyd said.

Burnham told him to be careful as he walked into the computer lab.

Floyd scanned the room.

In the far right corner of the lab, he saw a man in a lime green windbreaker looking at a flashing screen.

Floyd got closer and saw a picture of a mature woman, with curly hair, spreading her legs.

Floyd took a deep breath. “Hey, man. You got to log off.”

The man continued staring at the screen.

Floyd tugged at the man’s windbreaker.

The man cringed, and spun around to face Floyd.

“You can’t be looking at that shit in here!” Floyd said.

“Oh, sorry,” he said, clicking the X on the top right of the photo. The screen returned to the man’s profile. “Is that better?”

“No, for the last time, you can’t be looking at that shit in here. Log off.”

“I’m not looking at porn—this is a dating website.”

“It doesn’t matter how you define the website. You can’t go ogling wide-open pussy pics in a college computer lab!”

“It’s not my fault if this type of stuff appears on dating website I’m signed up on. Would you be treating me this way if I was on a medical website?”

“The girl who was next to you came up and said you were creeping her out.”

“Yeah, she should mind her own business. I wasn’t looking at her screen.”

Floyd bent down and turned off the computer.

He picked up the man’s bag and shoved it into his arms.

“You got a problem with library policy? Then you’re fucking out of here!”

The man stood up. “I’ll report your behavior to your manager!”

“Shit, I’ll escort you to her,” Floyd turned sideways and pointed to the door. “MOVE!”

Floyd followed the man out.

The man immediately went up to the desk and started complaining to Burnham.

Floyd leaned against a nearby pillar and crossed his arms.

He heard the automatic front doors open.

He turned around and saw Tanya walk in.

The man raised his voice.

Tanya jumped.

Floyd whistled, and motioned her over.

“Good timing,” Floyd said.

“What’s that about?” Tanya asked.

“Oh, just some perv who thinks he can surf porn

on ACC's computers. You're not taking part in the Writers Club tonight?"

"I had family business to attend to. I told April I would pick her up afterwards, so we can get some groceries. Why aren't you in there?"

The man raised his voice, demanding that Burnham explain to him why students could look at pictures of "topless African women", but he could not check out a dating website that featured the occasional nude photo uploaded by members.

Burnham stuttered, regained her composure, and re-explained the library's computer policy.

Floyd shook his head. "Some people. But yeah. Fuck Bottrall and her club. I get bitched at enough just being in the same room as her twice a week."

"Oh," Tanya said.

"Besides, I'm working right now."

"This is your job?"

Floyd told her the same thing he told April earlier. "It'll be a nice portion to add to my savings before I head to WMU," he added.

"You've been accepted yet?"

"No, but I did apply for student housing. Elmwood apartments, which I guess is the cheapest, non-dorm housing on campus."

Tanya smiled. "That's nice to hear."

Burnham and the man ended their conversation.

The man walked back to the computer lab.

"Yep, life's getting slightly better," Floyd walked up to Burnham. "So?"

Burnham rubbed her eyes.

"I finally convinced him to follow the rules. He won't visit sites like that here anymore."

"Do you want me to keep an eye on him?"

"No, just go about your assigned duties. We'll boot him for real if anyone else complains."

"All right."

"Oh, and Floyd?"

“Hmm?”

“I appreciate your enthusiasm, but next time a tense situation like this arises, please keep your language and attitude in check.”

“Yeah, sorry about that. Shit like that just makes me angry.”

“Same here, but we need to be professional.”

“Got it.”

Floyd went back to checking in returned books, helping patrons, and making sure no trash accumulated around the library.

He occasionally peeked into the computer lab to see what the man was browsing.

Each time, it was either Yahoo Mail, Facebook, or Fox News.

The ACC Writers Club ended their weekly session.

Floyd waved goodbye to April and Tanya.

The man left a few minutes later, with his bag underneath his arm, head down.

Burnham asked Floyd to make sure there was no one else in the library as she prepared to lock up for the night.

Floyd did so, not encountering anyone.

Burnham had her fur coat on by the time he returned up front.

“Anything else?” Floyd asked.

“Let me just shut this down,” Burnham said, turning off the front desks’ computer. “Can you follow me out to my car?” Burnham asked. “That guy earlier had me really shaken up.”

“No prob.”

“Okay, let’s go.”

They exited the library, and Burnham locked up the front doors.

They walked out to the parking lot.

“Thank you,” Burnham said, unlocking her door.

“It’s cool. Do I still have this job?” Floyd asked.

“Yes! Are you fine with working like tonight

Monday through Friday's, and occasionally Saturday mornings?"

"That'll work great!"

"We'll fill out the paperwork and hash out the other details tomorrow," Burnham got in her car.

"Good job today."

"I try my best. Goodnight."

Burnham shut her door, started the car, waved to Floyd, and drove off.

Floyd took out his keys and unlocked his car.

He stretched, looking up at the moon.

# 13

Floyd sneezed into his sleeve.

He wiped, sucked up the snot, and spitted it out the blinds window.

He went back to reading the same issue of *Hustler* from the early nineties that had been in there since he was a kid.

He once again read the letters section, the interview with Yasser Arafat, the mediocre horror/erotic short story, and examined the personals.

He put the magazine down.

He leaned back in the office chair and looked at the termite-damaged ceiling.

His foot accidently bumped the heater.

Floyd looked at the magazine rack.

It contained two old and ragged copies of *Penthouse* and *Easyriders*.

He sat up and looked out the window.

Down in the clearing, to his left, he saw a doe staring at him.

Floyd stiffened and held his breath, looking directly at the deer.

After a few seconds, he exhaled, relaxed his body, and blinked a few times.

The doe continued to stare at him.

Floyd grabbed his rifle and cradled it on his lap.

The doe resumed feeding.  
Floyd inched up to the window.  
The doe started moving.  
Floyd froze until it stopped to feed again.  
He took a deep breath, counted to three, and slowly placed the barrel on the window sill.  
The doe looked up, and went back to feeding.  
Floyd aimed the scope until all he saw was brown fur.  
He tried to relax.  
He breathed deeply.  
When he exhaled, the scope started shaking again.  
The doe moved.  
Floyd took the shot.  
The scope hit his eye.  
He looked up and saw the doe running away.  
Floyd smacked the counter.  
He placed the gun back down, and leaned back in the chair.

Floyd let out two shots.  
The deer turned back and ran the way it came.  
He shook his head and growled as he watched it disappear.  
He closed the windows, turned off the heater, stuffed the three empty shell casings into his pocket, locked up the blind, and went down to the clearing.  
He scanned the ground with his flashlight.  
He walked onto the trail where the last deer passed by.  
He didn't find any blood.  
Floyd went back into the clearing.  
He discovered a red spot on top of a beat.  
He scanned the rest of the area and found more blood on top of the snow.  
The followed the trail the spots made into the swamp area near Will's blind.  
He heard thrashing.



He pointed his flashlight at the direction of the sound.

A deer's head appeared for an instant in front of a tree.

He shined the flashlight at its base.

The deer went wild.

Floyd recognized it as the doe he thought he missed.

He stepped closer.

The doe grunted and wheezed.

It attempted to heave itself forward.

It fell down and smashed its head on a root.

Floyd paced, muttering "Fuck".

The doe started thrashing about again.

He looked around until he saw a downed branch.

He placed the flashlight on it, and adjusted the light onto the doe.

He unstrapped his rifle and walked up to it.

"God, I'm sorry," Floyd said, aiming at the area of fur that was red.

He breathed deeply, closed his eyes, and pulled the trigger.

The doe screeched.

It kicked Floyd in the shin.

Floyd back off and watched it freak out.

Floyd swallowed, slung his rifle over his shoulder, grabbed his flashlight, and walked away.

Floyd showed Will, Henry, and Kurt where he shot the doe.

He proceeded to lead them into the swamp.

Floyd noticed that his Dad wasn't with them.

He looked back and saw him still looking around the area.

Floyd called for him.

Henry told him he was going to search for signs of the other deer.

Will asked Floyd where he shot it.

Floyd explained what happened.

"You're supposed to kill them with one shot," Will said.

"That's what I was trying to do," Floyd said.

They came to the doe, which was lying still.

Blood covered the snow and roots.

Kurt bent down and examined it.

"Sure you were," Will said.

Floyd narrowed his eyes. "Fuck you."

"Hey," Kurt said, holding the deer's head up, "this is a buck."

"What?" Floyd walked over and crouched down beside his Grandpa. "Where are its horns?"

Kurt handed Floyd his flashlight.

He pushed some of the fur away from the deer's head, revealing two stubs.

Floyd punched the ground.

"Hey, it happens," Kurt said, patting Floyd on the back. "I've done it more than once. It's nothing to be ashamed of."

"Want to gut it here?" Will asked.

"Your Dad has the tools," Kurt grabbed one of the buck's legs and stood up. "Let's drag it back to your blind."

"I got this, Grandpa," Will took the leg from Kurt. "Lead the way."

Floyd handed Kurt his flashlight, and took a hold of the deer's other leg.

"Good job, dumbass," Will whispered as they started dragging it.

Floyd kept his attention on Kurt's outline.

They entered the clearing.

Henry was in the woods on the opposite side of the trail, scanning the ground with his flashlight.

Floyd dropped the leg and walked over. "Hey, Dad, we need—"

"DON'T MOVE!" Henry said.

Floyd froze.

Henry walked back, his flashlight illuminating a trail of blood spots.

"You said the other deer you shot went this way?"

"Yeah, it ran off towards Uncle Bruce's blind."

"Buck or doe?"

"Doe."

"That's what you thought last time," Will said, walking up.

"What happened?" Henry asked.

Will nodded at Floyd. "He shot a buck that barely had its horns out."

Henry glared at Floyd, pursing his lips.

"I thought it was a doe," Floyd said.

He tried breathing through his clogged nose.

"Come on, let's see where this other deer went," Henry said, turning around and following the blood.

Will whistled to Kurt, and they followed Henry through the woods.

Kurt joined Henry up front.

Floyd ignored what Will was saying, but determined that, from the tone of his voice, he was trying to lecture him.

They heard grunting.

Henry and Kurt moved to the right.

Floyd and Will ran after them.

Henry and Kurt were illuminating a deer that had its stomach blown out.

It tried to move.

Its insides scraped against the ground.

The deer grunted.

"Jesus Christ, Floyd," Will said.

Henry handed Kurt his flashlight.

He unstrapped his rifle, pressed it against the deer's neck, and pulled the trigger.

The deer screeched, and violently thrashed about.

Henry back away, took aim, and shot its upper body.

The deer grunted a few more times, and went still.

"Shit," Henry said, lowering his rifle.

"What is it?" Will asked.

Kurt pointed the flashlights at the deer's head.

Henry bent down. "Doe," he said, holding its head.

"You got it right his time," Will said.

"Fuck you," Floyd said.

"This one will be quicker to clean," Kurt said.  
"Want to do it here?"

"Might as well," Henry said, laying out the gloves and knife.

Henry cleaned the deer, and him and Kurt dragged the deer back to the path, following Will and Floyd.

Will started lecturing Floyd again.

Floyd stared at the ground.

Will punched him in the arm. "Did you hear me?" he asked.

Floyd suddenly raised his flashlight over his head.

Will covered himself.

Floyd walked ahead.

"I said, 'this is what happens when you don't join Dad and I when we're getting our scope's adjusted,'" Will said, walking up to him.

"Yeah, because I really wanna be around you two as it is," Floyd said.

"You'd be good at this too if you actually cared!"

"It wouldn't matter how good I was," Floyd sniffed hard, and swallowed. "You'd still find a reason to run your fucking mouth."

"HEY!" Henry yelled. "SHUT THE FUCK UP!"

They retrieved the buck, and walked back to the camp in silence.

Henry said, as they hung the deer on the pole, that they would claim Floyd shot the doe, while Henry shot the buck.

Will whispered to Floyd as they went inside that Henry had better not get in trouble "due to your fuck

up.”

Floyd went to the back room and put his rifle in the case.

He grabbed his backpack and put it on as he passed by Henry, Kurt, and Will, who were unloading and inspecting their rifles.

He used the bathroom.

After washing his hands, he looked himself over in the mirror.

He saw the reflection of the buck painting behind him.

He dried his hands, blew his nose in some toilet paper, and entered the kitchen.

“Hey Floyd, you want to help me get dinner ready?” Henry asked, holding four steaks he took out of the freezer.

“Nah, I’m gonna head home,” Floyd said, walking by.

Henry put the steaks on the counters and grabbed Floyd by the shoulder. “Why? What’s the matter?”

“I got my deer for the season. I don’t have to be out here.”

Henry laughed. “You don’t have to stop hunting at two! Just try to leave some for us!”

Floyd looked at Will and Kurt, who were sitting on the couch, watching television.

Will looked over at him, glared, and shook his head.

“No, I’m good. I should check my homework anyway, or Mom will get on my case.”

“Hey,” Henry looked Floyd directly in the eye, “shit happens—there’s no use getting upset over this.”

Floyd nodded.

He didn’t look at anyone as he walked out.

He saw Kurt and Will’s shadows from the living room window be joined by his Dad’s.

He looked at the deer hanging on the pole, slightly

illuminated by the porch light.  
The wind made them swing.

# 14

Floyd coughed at the stop light.  
He snorted, and took a deep breath.  
His nose instantly clogged up.  
The car behind him honked its horn.  
He turned right onto South 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue.  
He pulled into the driveway.  
He sniffed hard, and swallowed.

Will came out of the side door, twirling his car keys around.

“You get fired already?” Will asked.

“No, I’m sick,” Floyd said. “They sent me home early.”

“Sucks to be you.” Will unlocked his truck, got in, and backed out.

Floyd flipped him off and went inside.

Naomi and Henry were eating dinner.

Henry looked up. “Hey, Floyd, back already?”

“Yeah, they sent me home,” Floyd slipped off his shoes. “They thought I would contaminate the library.”

“Think you’re up for some dinner?” Naomi asked. “I made stir fry.”

“Let me take a shower first, and see if I can clear myself up.”

Floyd walked down the hall.

He heard someone behind him.

“Hey, we got a call earlier,” Naomi whispered as she turned the corner.

“From who?”

Naomi put a finger to her lips. “WMU Housing. I don’t know if it’s too late to call them back.”

Floyd sighed, went into his bedroom, and shut the door.

He looked up the number on the caller I.D. and dialed it.

He got a receptionist who asked him how to direct his call.

He told her who he was and his purpose for calling.

He was transferred to a woman named Betsy.

“This is Betsy, how can I help you?” Betsy asked.

“Hi, my name is Floyd Spicer. I saw that you guys called me earlier.”

Betsy asked Floyd for his address, phone number, and social security number.

Naomi came in while Betsy looked up Floyd’s information.

“Mr. Spicer?”

“Yep, I’m still here.”

“I’m seeing here that you recently applied for a unit in the Elmwood Apartments.”

“Yes, I did. Is there a problem with my application?”

“Well, yes. We have no record of you applying for Western.”

Floyd blinked a few times. “Wait, what? How can that be?”

“We have no record of you applying. You must be accepted into the university before you can apply for housing.”

“Okay, something’s up here. I applied last month.”

“Did you receive a letter of acceptance?”

“Letter of acceptance?” Floyd repeated. Naomi shook her head. “No, I haven’t received anything



from WMU in the mail.”

“Well, sir, I suggest you call the Office of Admissions tomorrow, and see what’s going on. It’s probably just a mistake.”

“Okay.”

“After you get it all figured out, feel free to apply again.”

“Okay.”

Betsy asked if there were anything else Floyd needed help on.

He said there wasn’t.

She wished Floyd a good night, and they hung up.

“Where’s the folder with your paperwork?” Naomi asked.

Floyd searched his desk and bookshelf.

Naomi criticized him for how disorganized he was.

He left his room and went into the family room.

He searched the bookshelf.

He found the folder.

He opened it and found his WMU application inside, half finished.

“What’s going on?” Henry asked.

Floyd ignored him, sat down at the computer desk, and started filling out the rest of his application.

Naomi entered and stood over Floyd, arms crossed.

“What?” Henry asked her.

“WMU Housing said he couldn’t apply for his apartment because he hadn’t submitted his application yet.”

Floyd smelled his Dad’s breath as he leaned over his shoulder.

Floyd leaned closer to the application.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Henry said, turning his head towards Floyd’s ear, “what the fuck’s wrong with you?”

Floyd spun around. "FUCK YOU!"

Henry backed away.

Floyd stood up.

Naomi got between them, putting her hand on Henry's chest as he tried to come at Floyd.

Henry swatted Naomi's hand away and walked to the laundry room.

Floyd sat back down to finish the application.

Floyd heard Henry and Naomi arguing.

Henry appeared in the doorway and yelled, "FINE! DON'T FUCKING APPLY, COCKSUCKER! I DON'T GIVE A FUCK ANYMORE!"

Floyd finished the application.

He put it in a manila envelope and slapped some stamps on it.

Naomi had returned to the family room.

"Is this enough stamps?" Floyd asked.

"More than enough," Naomi replied.

"I'll be back."

"I could mail that tomorrow for you."

"No, I'm doing it now."

Naomi followed Floyd out to the entrance way.

"I can get it so that it's delivered the next day."

Floyd put on his shoes.

"No, I need to get out of here."

Floyd put on his hoodie.

He turned around to Henry standing in front of him, glaring.

His body was shaking, fists clenched.

Floyd coughed in Henry's face.

Henry winced.

Floyd walked around him and out the door.

Floyd sneezed, covering his steering wheel with snot and blood.

He resumed crying.

He crossed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Bridge and pulled into the post office's parking lot.

He drove up to the mailbox, rolled down the window, and slipped the envelope in.

The inside of his car now smelled like the nearby hardboard manufacturer.

He pulled into a parking spot and smashed his forehead into the steering wheel.

He looked up, wiped his eyes, and saw the outline of the salt pile next to the Thunder Bay River.

He tried tuning into 106 KHQ.

All he got was static.

He put in a Bob Dylan album.

It started skipping on the first track.

